

THE COMMUNICATOR  
The USAID PHN Newsletter for CAs  
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The Communicator's Goals:

- \* To increase the flow of information between USAID's Bureau for Global Health and CAs engaged in communications and public relations work
- \* To enhance awareness of the need to disseminate news about our work and to show why it is important

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If you would like back issues of The Communicator, e-mail [lhomiak@phn.pal-tech.com](mailto:lhomiak@phn.pal-tech.com).

IN THIS ISSUE

- Getting the Message Out Using Letters to the Editor  
Examples
- Helping the News Media Cover Family Planning  
Total Family Planning Communications  
How to Tell the Family Planning Story  
Making News: Creating Media Events
- Resources for You  
Inbox of Tricks For Sending a Pitch  
Communications Effectiveness in an Internet Environment  
Get Media Training
- What Others Are Doing  
Creating Effective Message Campaigns
- Your Feedback
- How to Subscribe and Unsubscribe

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GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT USING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Communicating the important work we do takes many forms. In past issues, we have encouraged you to develop a catalog of success stories as one way to promote the important work of your organization. Now let's talk about responding to media coverage of global health issues by writing letters to the editors of both local and national publications. By so doing, we can increase the visibility and public understanding of

these issues. Below are some examples of how Penelope Riseborough of John Snow, Inc. (JSI), capitalized on news stories to further advance important issues.

1. Link to story: [New York Times: October 16, "Global War on AIDS Runs Short of Key Weapon"]

Dear Editor:

In "Global War on AIDS Runs Short of Key Weapon" (news article, Oct.9), reporter Donald McNeil made the important point that distribution and storage problems are a major impediment to making condoms available in "the most remote corners of the world."

Thirty years in international public health has taught me that the supply chain is a critical, but often overlooked, element in the success of any health program. In order to assure that condoms and other essential health commodities provided by donors don't languish and expire in central warehouses, products must move through an efficient supply chain. This requires that storage facilities be improved, distribution systems be strengthened, and demand be monitored so that the existing supply of condoms can be made available wherever and whenever a man or woman wants them.

Richard C. Owens, Jr.  
VP, John Snow, Inc., Arlington, VA

2. Link to story: [Boston Globe: October 17, page A14 "Using every resource to fight disease"]

To the Editor:

I applaud the decision by the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to allow for the purchase of antiretrovirals and other drugs in response to these epidemics ("Fund to allow sales of generic drugs," Oct. 12).

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson's comment that he remains cautious about procurement and administrative spending reflects the reality that every dollar spent on administration is a dollar that can't be used to prevent or treat one of these killer diseases. With that said, administration and oversight are necessary.

A prime example is the need for supply systems that ensure that the need for medicines is forecast accurately and that they make their way from the factory to the hands of patients without interruption. We all want to be assured that these dollars--money from taxpayers like you and me--are used for the benefit of people infected and affected by HIV, TB, and malaria. That assurance takes money.

Perhaps the secretary should be working with others in the Bush administration to find the additional funding to insure the fund's success. The government's commitment of

\$200 million is a good start, but it's only that. What is needed is a public sector response appropriate to these scourges.

Andrew Fullem

3. By Natalia Vartapetova, John Snow, Inc., Project Director, Women and Infant Health (WIN) Program and Laura Reichenbach, John Snow, Inc.

To the Editor:

The November 1 article, “Up From the Underground, Russia’s Feminists Reach Out,” failed to account for the basic health issues Russian women deal with daily. For many reasons, including restructuring of the health care system, Russian women face inadequate contraceptive counseling and supply, resulting in high abortion rates and high maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. This is exacerbated by antiquated prenatal care and birth practices. In maternity wards, for example, women are separated from their babies immediately following birth and newborns are given formula or sugar water despite the proven health and other benefits of immediate and exclusive breastfeeding.

The USAID-funded Women and Infant Health (WIN) Project is working to expand the health choices of Russian women, from choosing contraception over abortion to choosing fewer technical interventions during childbirth. 'Family-friendly' facilities in two regions (oblasts) of Russia now enable parents to bond with newborns, and give families more power to decide how to care for their newborns — all things activists accomplished for US maternity units in the 1960s and 70s. Through US foreign assistance, the WIN Project is training providers to be better counselors who involve women in decisions affecting their health rather than relying solely on the judgement of medical providers, as is usually the case in Russia and countries of the former Soviet Union.

It’s true, in Russia women’s rights are changing. Let us hope that soon, all Russian women will not only be able to plan whether and when to have children, but also how to bring those children into the world.

Start your own letter to the editor campaign when stories are run that you can weigh in on. And please share with all of us any letters you have had published.

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## HELPING THE NEWS MEDIA COVER FAMILY PLANNING

The spread of various forms of media, communications methods, and increasing literacy rates in many countries offers a number of opportunities for family planning and other health care organizations to inform the public and influence opinion leaders. Making the

most of these opportunities requires skill in helping the news media cover issues in family planning and reproductive health. PR professionals use multiple approaches to encourage and ensure accurate coverage. To help educate and inform others about these efforts, Population Reports published by Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs devoted an entire issue to this topic. If, somehow, you've missed this great resource, here's your chance to make up for lost time. You can read about some of the covered topics below or go directly to the JHUCCP site and download the publication in electronic form (J-42).  
<http://www.jhuccp.org/pr/j42edsum.stm>

## Total Family Planning Communications

Working with the news media should be a vital component of the communications effort of every organization working in family planning and other health care areas. Many communication campaigns spread their messages by targeting selected groups directly. When working with the news media, remember that journalists make their decisions based on newsworthiness and appeal to their audience. However, adding a news media component to any communications strategy can increase an issue's importance and credibility.

## How to Tell the Family Planning Story

One of the most important tasks in media relations is finding stories that will interest journalists. A good news item contains at least one of the following elements: immediacy, proximity, consequence, and human interest, while often dealing with certain trends, important people, and conflict or controversy. Usually family planning events make the news when they have a significant impact on people's lives, involve visible leaders, or deal with controversial issues. Many family planning stories – more than people think – have potential news value. Here are some examples:

- New People – “Noted physicians to head health program”
- New Services – “Ministry launches rural health initiative”
- New Policies – “Program to provide condoms for youth”
- New Contraceptives – “Injectables become available here”
- New Hours – “Clinic open weekends to meet rising demand”
- New Data – “Number of rural clients sets records”
- New Funding or Resources – “Leading bank donates mobile vans”
- New Trends – “More couples postponing births, survey shows”
- New Ideas – “Community discussion groups spark interest in family planning”

## Making News: Creating Media Events

Creating newsworthy events is one way to inspire media coverage. Events such as the opening of a new clinic, launch of a new campaign, or even release of a new study can help provide the news hook reporters look for. To plan a successful media event, start by seeing it from a journalist's point of view instead of concentrating on self-promotion.

Here are some tips:

- Keep it short and simple.
- Send out a news release about the event that makes clear why it is worth covering.
- Obtain an advance text, or a summary, from speakers. If journalists can't attend in person, they can provide coverage based on news releases or advanced texts.
- Offer to arrange private interviews between journalists and the key participants. Such interviews help give an exclusive focus to a story, which journalists like.
- Provide handouts, T-shirts, pens, etc., if possible, to add interest to the event and give journalists a reminder of your organization.

[SOURCE: Population Reports, Series J, Number 42]

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## RESOURCES FOR YOU

### Inbox of Tricks for Sending a Pitch

A recent survey found that for the first time journalists prefer to communicate with sources via e-mail rather than by telephone or personal visit. Furthermore, e-mail is rapidly catching up to press releases and personal leads as a source for story ideas, increasing the popularity of the e-mail pitch. Pitching via e-mail requires the basics: writing a catchy subject line, conciseness, giving the 'meat' of the story in the first paragraph, and avoiding attachments. PR professionals say that establishing relationships with journalists is essential to the extent that your name is associated with relevant issues. When pitching stories via e-mail, don't be tempted by e-mail to appear too familiar - remember to remain professional.

Here are some DOs...

- 1.DO get to know the publication you are pitching – its readership, style, sections, lead time, and editors.
- 2.DO write in simple terms – if you can't explain the story to your grandmother in 15 seconds, it's probably not simple enough.
- 3.DO follow up your e-mail with a phone call – remember to indicate so in your initial e-mail message.

And the DON'Ts...

- 1.DON'T spam – ever!
- 2.DON'T tell the entire story in a pitch – give enough to get reporters interested, and they will call you back.
- 3.DON'T send attachments unless the reporter is expecting you to do so.

[SOURCE: PRWeek, AUTHOR: Aleksandra Todorova]

### Communications Effectiveness in an Internet Environment

The Internet environment currently comprises 3 billion Web pages, some 80,000 news groups, and approximately 15,000 editors and reporters writing for online publications. Data that you may collect, therefore, is likely to be of questionable validity and contain information gaps. While a number of organizations such as SRDS (Standard Rate and Data Services) and comScore are working to audit and verify traffic rates, gaps continue to exist. For instance, publications requiring subscriptions are excluded from most Web searches. Even the most comprehensive search companies can only gather 60-80% of what you are looking for, compared to an 85% return from print news clippings. Measurement expert K.D. Paine explains three major categories of purpose to measure the effectiveness of your Web PR efforts:

1. Proactive Publicity – Since most organizations include “the Internet” as an audience and recent statistics show that consumers are increasingly turning to the Internet first for information, a proactive PR campaign today must include a Web presence.
2. Reactive Crisis Management – Journalists are likewise turning increasingly to the Web, particularly when they are following a crisis. As a result, most major organizations have developed ‘crisis communications’ Web sites that they can turn on when necessary. These sites contain background information as well as contact information, thus becoming the place for journalists to obtain the most recent data.
3. Relationship Building – The largest difference between the Web and other forms of media, is the Web’s interactive nature. It therefore becomes a perfect place for building relationships with your publics. Dialog among various groups and individuals is occurring constantly. The goals of all such dialogs form the basics of PR objectives: to educate, convince, win over, make aware, and persuade.

[SOURCE: PR Network, AUTHOR: K.D. Paine]

### Get Media Training

Media training is one of those subjects that is often only applied to situations involving a TV camera. Rick Amme, who heads the crisis and media relations firm Amme & Associates, Inc., takes a broader view and refers to this often overlooked issue as communications coaching because it applies across many disciplines. If, for instance, you need to develop the following skills you should consider some form of media training.

- Take charge of your message in meetings and presentations and not be held hostage by an adversarial audience.
- Anticipate tough questions and use those very questions to determine what you will convey; perhaps even pre-empt the tough questions with your comments.
- Guide dissent toward your point of view. Direct a conversation toward the issues important to you even as you answer tough questions.
- Talk in concepts rather than memorized sentences. Communicate the essence of your argument naturally rather than through rote recitation. Have the confidence and freedom to choose conversational words.
- Take the initiative at the beginning of a vital presentation. Stake out your position immediately while still reassuring listeners that they will get their turn.
- Know what people most want to hear so that you can prepare messages that go to the heart of their wants and needs.

Notice how none of the above include communicating to the news media. The reason for this is that good media training should teach you to communicate to audiences beyond journalists in TV, newspaper, and radio.

[SOURCE: PR Network, AUTHOR: Richard Amme]

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## WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

### Creating Effective Message Campaigns

Over the next few issues of eCatalyst, IMPACS' monthly electronic newsletter, IMPACS will share one of its approaches to creating effective message campaigns. The first lesson examines the meaning of 'message' and determines what constitutes a 'good message.' A message is a short phrase that is rich with symbols and meaning and which speaks to the core value of a target audience. Once a message is well crafted, it can help nonprofits move audiences from not understanding an issue to fully supporting it. The message is most effective if it is tailored to a specific audience's core values, attitudes, and priorities. For instance, messages about an environmental issue that are aimed at getting business leaders to change behavior may focus on themes of improving their bottom line, while the same issues targeted toward senior citizens may focus on health. Be careful, however, not to send "mixed messages," by ensuring that all messages sent to various audiences have some element in common. To avoid sending "mixed messages," build your messages from the most general to the most detailed.

To view this lesson and look for the next three messages, go to <http://www.impacs.org>

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## YOUR FEEDBACK

With your participation this newsletter can increase our interaction in getting the word out about what we do. Let us know what you would like to see in this newsletter, what topics you want covered, or what additional items should be included. We also encourage you to become a contributor -- pass along stories about your program, including poignant accounts, major accomplishments, new publications, awards received, or upcoming conferences, to [lhomiak@phn.pal-tech.com](mailto:lhomiak@phn.pal-tech.com).

Also, if you know people who should get this newsletter, let us know so we can add them to our subscribers list.

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